

STAT

Their barb is worse than

THE NAKED EMPEROR: An Anthology of International Political Satire. Compiled and edited by Barbara Fultz. Pegasus, 223 pp. \$10.

NO KNOWN SURVIVORS: David Levine's Political Plank. Caricatures by David Levine. Gambit, 194 pp. \$7.95.

By Richard Hanser

"In the present state of the world it is difficult not to write satire."

Well, yes. But when Juvenal wrote the line he was thinking of the Roman Empire of A.D. 100, which suggests that there has seldom been a time when satire did not seem to be the only adequate response by the writer to the state of the world. The law of supply and demand is stubbornly inoperative in this area, however. Though the need for satire has been constant through the centuries, our store of the vintage stuff remains skimpy, and we have a hundred masterpieces of poetry, narration and nonfiction for every immortal stroke of satire. Mankind being what it is, there are always more than enough occasions for mockery, derision and contempt, but there is hardly ever a Jonathan Swift available capable of turning savage indignation into literature.

The perpetual scarcity of Swifts is amply illustrated again by *The Naked Emperor*, which describes itself as "an anthology of international political satire." Its material is drawn from the humor magazines of seven nations — *Le Canard enchaîné* (France), *Pardon* (West Germany), *Krokodil* (Russia), *Monocle* (USA), *Świat* (Poland), *Private Eye* (England) and *Tia Vicenta* (Argentina). Ranging that widely, tapping all those sources, the book can be taken as a fairly accurate indicator of how things stand with wit and humor in a world that badly needs as much of both as it can get. Unhappily, like the news from everywhere else, the report from this sector also turns out to be depressing.

The main difficulty with a book like *The Naked Emperor* may be that political satire, being necessarily topical, is also highly perishable. However blistering the stuff may be when it comes from the typewriter, the sting and passion evaporate by the time it appears in an anthology years later, and often in translation at that. All those French jokes and cartoons about *Mongénéral* already have a whiff of mold about them, and the Argentine spoofing, verbal and visual, of Arturo Frondizi makes one shift uneasily in one's chair. Exactly who was (is) Frondizi? The bloody good fun that England's *Private Eye* was having with Sir Alec Douglas-Home back there in 1966 remains totally impenetrable to an outlander in 1970.

Though some of the great satirists — Aristophanes, Juvenal — were outright enemies of innovation and staunch defenders of traditional values, the current mode in satire is almost entirely liberal-left and thus virulently against the status quo. This makes for a certain monotony in a book like *The Naked Emperor*: The tone, the angle of vision, is the same throughout, with one exception, which comes as more of a trial than a relief. This is the Soviet section where

assault on the social at a few potshots at the lo the extracts from *Krokodil* funny.

Here the Soviet Agne remain sacrosanct, unt jibes and jesting. "Sla mean Siberian exile and something from the St didn't recur regularly Moscow. Since satire is as nonexistent in *Kroko*

Brennessel (The Thistle), which was the authorized "humor" magazine of the Nazis. *Krokodil* is as much a part of the Soviet establishment as the KGB, and just about as likely to turn on it. *Krokodil's* idea of a fearlessly satirical piece is an attack on Cyrus Sulzberger of *The New York Times*. And to show how little they can be intimidated by power and authority, they pull no punches when dealing with Paul Getty and Henry Ford II, either—but the emperors of the USSR remain fully clothed at all times.

The American establishment, too, remains largely unshaken by the contributions from *Monocle*, which appears so furtively and infrequently that its staff must be playing at getting out an underground paper in wartime. Its editor, Victor S. Navasky, writes about the police suppression of *Tia Vicenta* in Argentina with what seems like a touch of envy. "Satire is taken more seriously outside the USA," he says in his introduction to the present book. But in *Monocle*, at least a try is made at tinkering together a verbal fire bomb or two. Even if no explosion occurs, the malice and ill will are plainly there. Marvin Kitman's piece on how he found the secret headquarters of the CIA (he inquired at the Soviet Embassy) may be the most amusing thing in the book.

But, by and large, one is tempted to call *The Naked Emperor* a title in search of a book. The amount of genuine satire it offers is minimal, page after page being devoted to essays and cartoons that seldom get much above the level of the Penn State *Froth* or the Columbia *Jester*. The book is also burdened with a number of selections by writers who can't tell the difference between being snotty and being witty. Even the good passages, more often than not, keep reminding one of the saying by the Polish aphorist Adolf Neuwert Nowaczynski, who is not quoted in the book. "A satirist," he said, "is a lunatic who sets mousetraps for an elephant."

Still, it is easy to understand why every tyranny ever known has immediately clamped down hard on maverick humor and open irreverence. The invariable justification is that mockery and disrespect damage the state and hence are antisocial, but at the bottom of all such strictures is the injured vanity of the leader, commissar, duce or caudillo whose *amour-propre* must be protected no matter what. No dictator, no totalitarian regime, could possibly tolerate a David Levine, whose eye glints pure malice and whose right to the jugular like a poisoned arrow.